

# *Field Report*

## Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore

### ■ 1.0 Summary

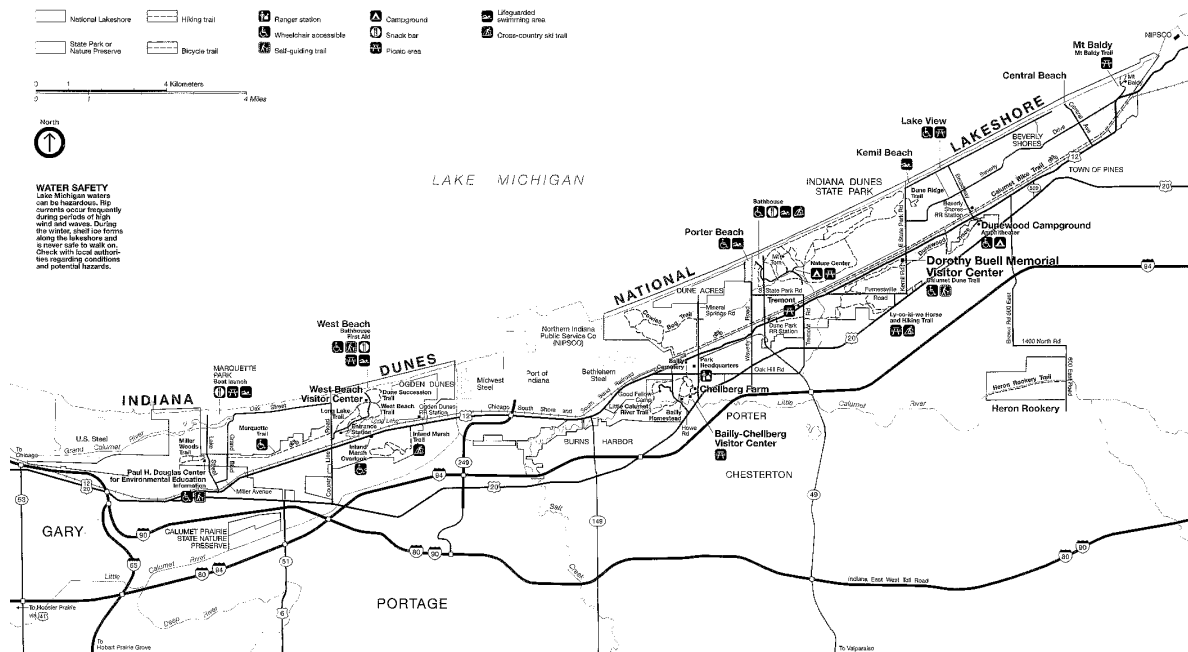
Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, located on the southern shore of Lake Michigan, is a potential long-term candidate for alternative modes of transportation. The 25-mile-long park runs from the city of Gary to Michigan City, Indiana. The Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore was established in 1966 to “preserve for the educational, inspirational, and recreational use of the public certain portions of the Indiana Dunes and other areas of scenic, scientific, and historic interest and recreational value in the state of Indiana” (Public Law 89-761). While highway access to the park is good, once at the park, parking resources in certain high-demand areas are limited, thus supporting the potential need for off-site parking with shuttle services. Past efforts to establish shuttle services have either not received local support or concessionaire interest. Given the proximity of an active passenger rail line to park facilities, transit services should be considered in the future. This would also include:

- The potential for extending existing city transit routes to better serve the park;
- Possible feeder bus routes to existing train stations, and loop services through areas with limited parking may be warranted in the future; and
- Further development of area bicycle routes and support facilities (auto parking, bicycle parking, comfort stations, etc.) appear to be needed as well.

### ■ 2.0 Background Information

#### 2.1 Location

Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore is located on the southern shore of Lake Michigan. The 25-mile-long park runs from the city of Gary to Michigan City, Indiana, approximately 50 miles southeast of Chicago, Illinois. The park contains approximately 15,000 acres, 2,182 of which are located in Indiana Dunes State Park and managed by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources. The park features beaches, sand dunes, bog, wetlands, and woodland forests (see Figure 1 for location and basic physical configuration).

**Figure 1. Indiana Dunes**

## 2.2 Administration and Classification

Indiana Dunes is a National Lakeshore Park. The superintendent is Dale Engquist.

## 2.3 Physical Description

Indiana Dunes NL consists of distinct areas organized around three visitor centers: 1) West Beach; 2) Bailly-Chellberg (see Figure 2); and 3) Dorothy Buell. There are five beach areas managed by the NPS as well as park areas managed by the city of Gary and the state of Indiana. The key characteristics related to transportation are:

- Roadway access to the park facilities is good. Interstates 65, 80, 90, and 94 all are within a few miles of parts of the park. U.S. 20, a four-lane highway, runs east-west along the southern boundary of the park. U.S. 12, a two-lane highway, is the principal road connecting park facilities.
- Local transit services are provided in Gary. The Gary Public Transit Corp (GPTC) provides service to Lake Street Beach, a city park adjacent to the NPS lands, and Marquette Park, also a city park. It has provided service to West Beach in the past. While no other local transit services are provided at this time, Michigan City's transit system comes very close to Mt. Baldy at the eastern end of the lakeshore.

- The Chicago South Shore and South railroad runs parallel to U.S. 12, providing freight and passenger rail service through the area. Passenger railroad stations are located at Ogden Dunes, Dune Park, and Beverly Shores. Commuter parking at these stations is in high demand with many area residents commuting to Chicago or South Bend via rail. Of the three rail stations, Beverly Shores offers some possible connection to park facilities (Dunewood Campground across street) and (Lakeview Beach one mile north). At the present time, the railroad does not permit bicycles on passenger trains. Further, the schedules are oriented to commuters and not to recreational uses. These two factors limit the amount of park-related railroad use.
- Recreational bicycle facilities are provided throughout the park, including the Calumet Trail (still under development) serving the central and eastern portions of the park, and the Marquette Trail serving the western section. Pedestrian access is limited to off-road trails and connections between parking facilities and resource areas.
- The western and central portions of the park are bisected by major industrial development containing Midwest Steel, the Port of Indiana, Bethlehem Steel, and a power plant. The park is also bordered by industrial development at its western and eastern edges.

**Figure 2. Farmstead at Chellberg Farm**



**Figure 3. Beverly Shores Train Station**

## 2.4 Mission and Goals of the National Lakeshore

The Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore was established in 1966 to “preserve for the educational, inspirational, and recreational use of the public certain portions of the Indiana Dunes and other areas of scenic, scientific, and historic interest and recreational value in the state of Indiana” (Public Law 89-761). The stated purpose of the park is to: 1) preserve, maintain, and restore the integrity and character of the natural resources and values at the lakeshore; 2) provide educational, inspirational, and recreational opportunities compatible with preserving natural and cultural resource values; 3) inspire the public in an appreciation of and a sense of personal stewardship for lakeshore resources; and 4) interpret, encourage, and conduct scientific research in the tradition of pioneer investigators.

## 2.5 Visitation Levels and Visitor Profile

Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore accommodates 2 million visitors per year, mostly in the summer months for beach-related recreation. Based on a survey conducted in 1993, visitors are often in family groups (55 percent) and most (60 percent) have visited Indiana Dunes previously. Most popular activities are walking on the beach (61 percent), sun bathing (52 percent), and swimming (51 percent). The most visited site in the park is

Mt. Baldy (see Figure 4). Further, most of the visitors are from areas nearby, with 44 percent from Indiana and 34 percent from Illinois.

### ■ 3.0 Existing Conditions, Issues and Concerns

The Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore is slowly and progressively reclaiming the Lake Michigan dunes from prior development. Significant progress has been made to develop interpretive facilities and to reclaim adjacent woodlands. At present, roughly half of the 700 buildings originally within park boundaries have been removed. Yet the park is situated between large-scale industrial development and roadway infrastructure. Other communities and facilities (Indiana Dunes State Park) are adjacent to the park and provide some challenges to providing consistent services and easily accessible facilities.

**Figure 4. Lake Michigan from Mt. Baldy**



### **3.1 Transportation Conditions, Issues and Concerns**

The transportation issues and concerns can be summarized as follows:

- Occasional parking demand in excess of supply, especially in the smaller lots;
- Need for continued development of bicycle trails to link existing facilities;
- Need for enhanced information systems to alert motorists to availability of parking;
- Desire to implement a shuttle bus system and transit center as an alternative to driving; and
- Potential for greater park usage by residents of neighboring communities, many of whom are transit dependent.

#### ***Parking***

The demand for parking varies throughout the park. The largest facility is at the West Beach Visitor Center (800 spaces), which in the past has been filled to capacity. In the past few seasons, however, there has been adequate parking in this lot to serve the demand. Some of the spaces are located rather distant from the beach entrance, which leads to very long walks for beachgoers. Parking resources in the middle area are adequate except during special events that occur once or twice per year. Alternative arrangements are made during these events.

The East Unit presents the most operational challenges with respect to parking. Spaces are provided in lots at Mt. Baldy and in lots located along Lakeshore Drive (Central Beach, Lakeview, Rostone, and Kemil Beach). All have limited capacity of 100 spaces or less. As the top visitor attraction in the park, the lots at Mt. Baldy often fill up but experience reasonable turnover of parking demand. The Central Beach lot, appears to provide adequate parking for the demand. The Lakeview, Rostone, and Kemil lots are often used to capacity with no alternative parking available nearby. This area of high demand, which is relatively close to the Beverly Shores train station, would appear to need some alternative such as a seasonal shuttle service (see discussion below).

#### ***Bicycling***

At present, there are two bicycle trails through the park. The Marquette Trail is located adjacent to the West Beach visitor center and the Calumet Bike Trail, situated adjacent to the rail lines and running from the central to east portions of Indiana Dunes NL. The state of Indiana has recently funded the Porter County Calumet Bicycle Pedestrian Trail Preservation project, which will rehabilitate and reconstruct the abandoned IDNR Bike/Pedestrian Trail and provide a link to the Dune Park train station. This trail is part of a long-term trail project along Lake Michigan's south shore from South Chicago through Lake, Porter and LaPorte Counties to the Michigan state line. These improvements should help to further enhance bicycle access through the park.

Full implementation of the lakeshore trail will provide outstanding facilities in the region. This may lead to the need for additional trail head parking resources and other bicycle-related services such as comfort stations to serve trail users.

### ***Information Systems***

Beyond roadway signage, the park has a limited information system for periods of high demand. The NPS personnel post temporary signs when a particular parking facility is full, but this information is often not received until a motorist has driven fairly close to the desired facility. Given the linear nature of the park, it would appear that an enhanced information system that provides real-time information, perhaps through radio transmissions, would be beneficial to park operations. In addition, variable message signs (VMS) could be used near entry points outside park boundaries.

### ***Shuttle Bus***

At present, the potential for alternative transportation access for Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore is fairly limited. As mentioned previously, roadway access is very good and transit services are quite limited. The General Management Plan for the facility has identified the potential for a West Unit transit center and shuttle bus system, which has recently been deferred pending a better indication of its feasibility. “Some of the factors that make the transit center and shuttle bus system infeasible at the present time are 1) the convenience and desire of West Beach users to use private automobiles, 2) the capacity of the existing West Beach parking area, which is full 10-25 days per year, and 3) no private sector response to the 1988 request for a proposal to operate the shuttle bus system” (West Unit GMP Amendment 1997).

For the East Unit, two potential shuttle services have been identified in the GMP in conjunction with a new visitor center to be located on Route 49 just north of U.S. 20. First is a shuttle to serve the Lake View and Kemil Beach area and the second is a trolley service between Michigan City and Mt. Baldy using vintage rail cars and linking up with a potential transit system in Michigan City. Neither of these concepts has been advanced, nor are they likely to proceed in the near future.

A related issue is linkage to the existing rail system. The South Shore railroad traverses the park. As mentioned previously, the Beverly Shores station offers some possible connection to park facilities (Dunewood Campground across street) and (Lakeview Beach one mile north), but for beachgoers, one mile is a long distance to walk. Weekend service could be a viable transportation alternative for Chicago or South Bend residents. In addition, as mentioned previously, bicycles are not permitted on the rail system.

## **3.2 Community Development Conditions, Issues and Concerns**

There is considerable economic activity in the northwest Indiana region. The major industrial facilities adjacent to the park are active, and the adjacent cities on either end of the park are pursuing active redevelopment. In Michigan City, redevelopment activities include an outlet mall and a casino. The only identified issue relates to the reclamation of

dunes areas that were previously opened for off-road vehicles. The users of these vehicles wish to continue to ride on the trails, but this activity is now prohibited.

### **3.3 Natural or Cultural Resource Conditions, Issues and Concerns**

No specific issues related to national or cultural resource issues related to transportation have been identified.

### **3.4 Recreation Conditions, Issues and Concerns**

Several recreation-related issues were described in the previous section on Transportation Conditions.

## **■ 4.0 Planning and Coordination**

### **4.1 Unit Plans**

A General Management Plan and Interpretive Plan for the National Lakeshore were completed in 1997.

### **4.2 Public and Agency Coordination**

Park staff coordinate with the Northeast Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC) and local transit operators to stay abreast of local planning initiatives. One of these is the initiative to implement clean fuels for transit vehicles that NIRPC is sponsoring. As mentioned previously, efforts to develop enhanced bicycle facilities have received funding and are proceeding. Efforts to establish trolley services have not been successful to date, especially those that depend upon the cooperation of other agencies and municipalities.

As mentioned previously, the Indiana Dunes State Park is adjacent to the National Lakeshore park. That facility attracts 800,000 visitors per year and offers a total of 300 campground sites. Community support and advocacy for both parks is provided by the Save the Dunes Council.

## ■ 5.0 Assessment of Need and System Options

### 5.1 Magnitude of Need

The need for an alternative system transportation is moderate at Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore. For the transit-dependent population, there are no feasible alternatives to get to most park facilities, especially beaches. In the Lakeshore Drive area, the high use of the limited number of parking spaces indicates that additional beach users could be accommodated if a remote parking area with shuttle service were instituted. It is not clear that the ridership of such a service would be particularly high, especially given the constraints associated with recreational uses such as the need to transport accoutrements that do not lend themselves to bus transportation.

### 5.2 Range of Feasible Transit Alternatives

The non-auto access options identified are consistent with those identified in a 1997 GMP. For the East Unit, two potential shuttle services have been identified. First is a shuttle to serve the Lake View and Kemil Beach area, “as demand warrants.” These are to be developed in conjunction with parking areas that would be developed on previously disturbed sites. Second is a “Trolley to the Dunes” project, providing access from Michigan City to Mt. Baldy and Crescent Dune in vintage South Shore rail cars.

In the short term, potential improvements include modifying existing bus lines from Gary to provide service to the park, at least to the West Unit and perhaps farther east. Should transit service be introduced in Michigan City, services to connect the park with that system should be explored.

As additional bicycle facilities are developed for the region, both locally and within the park, it will be desirable to increase the availability of bicycle support facilities such as auto parking, bicycle parking, comfort stations, etc.

Longer term, improved connections to the South Shore rail system should be explored. This could include running shuttle services from the train stations to the attractions within the park.

## ■ 6.0 Bibliography

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## ■ 7.0 Persons Interviewed

Gary Traynham, Assistant Superintendent, Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore

Fred Szarka, Management Assistant, Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore

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